

SIDNEY AND BEATRICE WEBB

member of the Labour Representation Committee which that Special Conference set up, with J Ramsay MacDonald as its secretaiy

Later on, ample tubute was to be paid by the historians of Trade Unionism to the vital importance of this step, and to the work of MacDonald in keeping the Labour Representation Committee alive so that it could be used to exploit the Taff Vale Decision¹ and so lead in 1901 to the establishment of an effective Labour Party At the time, however, Sidney Webb was a non-co-operator He thought the tactics poor They smacked of that premature and enthusiastic affixing of labels to bottles, which he deprecates For him, always, what matters is to get the patient to drink the mixture, and at this stage, and not without good arguments on his side, he thought he was more likely to drink, for his own good, and also to the promotion of sound doctrine, if advertisement was eschewed He was deeply engaged in the alternative method In the Progressive Party on the Council, he had got that association of good citizens for which he had pleaded in 1889 and 1890 and the Progressive Party was proving, under his leadership, a singularly effective instrument for getting a certain amount of practical Socialism quickly and quietly accomplished So far as the foundation of the Labour Representation Committee went, the issue, as between Webb on one hand, and Hardie and MacDonald on the other, was one of method Grosvenor Road was dedicated to a different

method Its entire atmosphere was of a kind
calculated
to cast doubt on the political instrument, as
clumsy, senti-

¹This legal judgment, delivered in 1901, arose out of an
unofficial strike
on the Taff Vale Railway in South Wales The Railway
Company sued the
Railwaymen's Union for damages, which the Courts
awarded it The effect
of this was to make every Trade Union, while legally denied
the privileges
of incorporation, liable to be sued in respect of any act
committed by anyone
deemed to be its agent which the Judges might hold to be
actionable Whether
or no sound in law, this judgment plainly contravened the
express intentions
of Parliament in its 1871-6 legislation The Trade Disputes
Act of 1906
accordingly restored the pre-Taff Vale position